United Nations E/CN.9/2014/NGO/19

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 January 2014

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Forty-seventh session
7-11 April 2014
General debate on national experience in population matters: assessment of the status of implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statement submitted by Population Action International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

14-21430 (E) 240114

Please recycle

Statement

Unfinished business: why sexual and reproductive health is key to achieving the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and critical to broader development success

In 1994, in Cairo, world leaders adopted the landmark Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, which calls for all countries to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015. A decade later, they adopted a target to achieve universal access to reproductive health by 2015, as part of Millennium Development Goal No. 5. Since its founding in 1965, Population Action International has supported these goals by advocating for women and families to have access to contraception in order to improve their health, reduce poverty and protect their environment. We work with local and national leaders in developing countries to improve reproductive health programmes and policies. We show how these programmes are critical to global concerns, such as preventing HIV, combating the effects of environmental degradation and climate change, and strengthening national development and security. Twenty years after Cairo, we welcome the opportunity to assess the status of implementation of the Programme of Action and to reflect upon progress and unfinished work.

Achieving the Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goal target on achieving universal access to reproductive health by 2015 are key to improving women's health and enhancing the status and rights of women and girls. Investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights, including ensuring access to modern contraception, has had a significant positive impact on the quality of life of women and girls. These investments have also helped improve maternal health and reduce child mortality. In the past two decades, maternal mortality has declined by 47 per cent. In areas where contraceptive use and skilled birth attendance at birth are high, maternal mortality tends to be lower.[1] Birth spacing, made possible by family planning, is critical to improving child health. Children born between three and five years apart are 2.5 times more likely to survive than children born two years apart.

However, the Cairo agenda is unfinished. Reducing the unmet need for family planning is still one of the goals of the Programme of Action that is furthest from being met. Today, there are 222 million women who want to delay or avoid pregnancy and are not using modern contraception.[2] Millions more do not have the basic information they need to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive lives. Providing services and information to women in developing countries whose need for modern methods of contraception is currently unmet would prevent 54 million unintended pregnancies.[2] Member States are obligated to work progressively towards the full realization of sexual and reproductive rights, to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted.

---

[1] *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2013* (United Nations, New York, 2013). Available from www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf.

[2] Susheela Singh and Jacqueline E. Darroch, "Adding it up: costs and benefits of contraceptive services — Estimates for 2012" (Guttmacher Institute and United Nations Population Fund, New York, June 2012). Available from www.guttmacher.org/pubs/AIU-2012-estimates.pdf.

As we reach 2015, the goal year for the International Conference on Population and Development and the Millennium Development Goals, it is essential to recognize sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning, as a key to development. In particular, we recommend that:

- As part of the post-2015 framework, United Nations Member States include a stand-alone goal on sexual and reproductive health and rights. A stand-alone goal, as well as mainstreaming sexual and reproductive health through the framework, would help make strides in other areas of development, and therefore needs to be emphasized in the post-2015 process. Achieving universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, including family planning, is critical for addressing an aspirational set of goals in a post-2015 development agenda;

- Governments increase their share of funding for public sector family planning services and supplies, and ensure that funding is disbursed in a timely manner. Governments that have not already created budget lines for family planning programmes and/or contraceptives should do so, to enhance transparency and foster accountability. Governments are the primary duty bearers responsible for meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of their citizens; it is time for them to step more fully into this role;

- Donors honour their commitments to support Governments in meeting the objectives of the Programme of Action, paying special attention to reducing the unmet need for family planning. The international community must make international cooperation and assistance more predictable and better aligned with national priorities, and channel assistance to recipient countries in ways that strengthen national health systems.

The coming months are a critical time for the United Nations Member States. Reviewing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and creating the post-2015 development agenda offer a unique opportunity to expand and improve services that have a great impact on the lives of people everywhere. It is important to build on the successes of the last two decades and find innovative ways to achieve the goals of the Programme of Action and the Millennium Development Goals that have yet to be realized. Achieving universal access to reproductive health and family planning services and supplies, with adequate funding and a supportive policy environment, is fundamental to achieving the Programme of Action and the Goals, and must be prioritized as the Programme of Action is reviewed.